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Defense Technology

Firm plans test facility

By **BRODIE FARQUHAR**
Star-Tribune staff writer

Defense Technology wants to go the extra mile in improving its relations with neighbors, said a vice president of Armor Holdings, Inc., Thursday in a telephone interview.

That includes constructing a new facility where tear gas grenades can be tested indoors.

Stephen E. Croskrey, head of the products division that includes the Defense Technology company in Casper, said he's instructed a staff engineer to see whether odors emanating

from the Neosho Road facility can be lessened.

He said no one upwind from the plant should be able to smell anything.

"But when you stand in the road in front of the plant and the wind is blowing there, there is an odor and that's a fact and we can't deny that," Croskrey said. He said an air-filtering system in the plant removes particulates that would otherwise get loose outside and cause irritation.

What's left is an odor that people can smell. Croskrey said

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it was an "olfactant in the air — no particulate and nothing toxic."

Neighbors downwind of the facility have complained of burning eyes, noses and throats, headaches, nausea and vomiting — all symptoms of exposure to tear gas. At least two say they have been forced to move because of sickness.

The neighbors, who live hundreds of yards away from the facility, say they believe their symptoms are connected to tear gas chemicals released in open-air tests, from factory vents, and over the past three years, by two fires at the Neosho Road plant north of Casper.

The state's Department of Environmental Quality and the federal Environmental Protection Agency are currently conducting their own investigations into the complaints.

Croskrey assured that based

on internal research, the company was meeting or beating the air emission standards set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Occupational Safety & Health Administration.

"We're going to work on that to reduce that odor. We may be able to come up with something," he said. His suppliers and air filtration experts can also help with the effort, he added.

"It is acceptable from a governmental standpoint — from a good neighbor viewpoint, we'll see what we can do," Croskrey said.

He said the company has been planning for months on a test facility building, where tear-gas grenade products could be tested indoors.

He said Agent CS — the more potent of two tear-gas formulas used by Defense Technology — is never regularly tested out of doors at the Neosho Road facility.

Croskrey acknowledged that there have been outdoor tear-gas tests — what he termed aberrations and mistakes. A 1996 letter from the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality instructed the company to conduct outdoor tests only within a water-filled, 55-gallon steel drum.

"We shouldn't have been doing it," he said. One test came about after a large order had been shipped out and the customer called back with a complaint. Workers at the Neosho Road facility "popped a canister" outside to see how the product worked, he said.

"We were aware of the need for a test facility in February," Croskrey said. He said a test facility could be started or finished in a matter of a few months, depending on how well the project goes.

He said no further CS tests would be conducted until a test facility could be constructed.